



“Building Quality in B Schools: Opportunities and Challenges”

01st Feb 2013 at IIM Bangalore

Executive Summary

IIM Bangalore (www.iimb.ernet.in) and eMBarkers, a higher education research and consulting firm founded by alumni of XLRI and IIMB (www.embarkers.in) organized a workshop at IIMB on 01st Feb 2013 to address the challenges that Indian management education is facing. A recent ASSOCHAM report stated that close to 180 *more* B Schools would close down this academic year, apart from the 100+ B schools that were closed last year. The workshop was meant for Heads of B Schools (Deans and Directors), who have the prime responsibility of shaping their management programmes. The programme participants were mostly from the Bangalore region, the hub of management education in South India. Close to 70 programme heads participated in this workshop.

Key speakers in this conference included members of faculty at IIM B (Professors Rajeev Gowda, Ganesh Prabhu, Kumar K) academic leaders (Prof. Nagabrahmam), industry experts and consultants (Dr. Randhir Mishra, Arun Muthukumar, Srinivas Swaroop, Madhavi Srinivas and Dr. Samir Kagalkar). The focus was on multiple issues relating to the delivery of quality academic programmes. Key factors like relevant research by faculty and students, encouraging entrepreneurial ambitions, understanding the larger economic context, understanding the spirit of the MBA programme, maturity models for expansion, impact of technology in scaling up a quality programme and role of Director as a transformational leader were discussed.

In the concluding session, Prof. Rajeev Gowda analyzed the major viewpoints put forth by Heads of Management programmes in response to a questionnaire circulated earlier. There were 10 major heads under which key issues were raised that required immediate attention for resolution. A total of 118 issues and around 104 solutions were proposed. Most of the issues raised were of the nature that can be resolved by a determined Director without the intervention of the promoter. The majority of the proposed solutions also are amenable of resolution under a visionary Director. The summary of issues and solutions is provided in the Appendix.

Some examples of issues raised and probable solutions:

- I. Case studies: One of the issues raised was that “*getting good case studies is expensive*”. Good cases written at leading B Schools are indeed expensive. And hence a faculty member may have difficulty in updating herself on this count. An aware academician would know that Harvard Publishing has a policy of giving access to these cases, including teaching notes and syllabus *free of cost for a faculty member* anywhere in the world. The genuineness of the faculty member is verified by checking that the applicant’s name is officially listed on her B School’s website. This requires that the Director ensures that all the faculty members’ details are present on the website and the faculty members apply for free access! Other case sites including European Case Clearing House (ECCH) also provide the same facility. Only when cases are actually used in the classroom would a fee need to be paid. *Resolution of this issue cannot be simpler than this!*
- II. Lack of adequate faculty members to take up the academic work load: True, it is indeed tough to get a large number of faculty members for each school, such that the school has a larger “bench strength” (to use the terminology of IT industry) to address issues that are non-routine in nature, e.g., consulting. While this is undoubtedly true, equally true is the fact that there can be a mechanism for resolving this issue. In any normal curve situation like a class room, one can expect to find students who are indeed above average in terms of performance. These senior students can be given the charge (with reasonable stipend) of being “tutors” for the junior batch of students, who may need additional handholding. This not only reduces the burden on the faculty, but also lets them concentrate on other value added tasks like consulting to the industry. Here too, the students too would be more than handy in working with them through a live project. It calls for a teacher to consider himself / herself a “knowledge manager”, who has students as their research associates. Indeed, this is how most of the top Institutes take the load off the faculty members (over and above hiring full time Research associates). Many other time-consuming but routine assignments, like quizzes can be completely digitized so that the time required in terms of evaluating can be put to other productive use. With an engagement on research or consulting or both, the quality of faculty would also improve, further benefiting the students and the Institute.

III. Industry readiness of students: Another key area of concern is that of students not being industry ready by the time they graduate. But industry does not have the time or bandwidth to address this challenge. To address this problem, it would be useful to engage early with organizations like Edu-Next that students to become more “corporate ready.” In addition, we suggest that alumni engagement can be a good help in this regard. Concerned alumni will be more effective in narrating their own experiences and prove to be better guides to the students. And indeed the corporate would welcome this gesture, for the reason that they can expect better quality students known to the current employees. It is here that being creative in connecting the dots can make a big difference to the maximum utilization of resources that any B School would anyway have.

In the backdrop of these few but simple examples, we strongly believe that there is immense potential for the Director to take charge of the programme and convert the quality vision of the programme into a reality. And there is no better way than to travel this journey with fellow Directors who too share similar concerns and constraints, through the “Directors’ League”. The Director’s League will provide a platform to address the entire range of challenges that were identified in the workshop and will also enable tailor-made solutions for individual B Schools.

The way ahead:

B Schools today need transformational leaders who will own up responsibility of building the B School rather than expecting a solution from the promoters. While it is unrealistic to expect any Director to single handedly build any institute, it is equally true that without leading by example, no Director can inspire the team of academicians and administrators in the act of institute building. An example lies in front of us, in the form of Prof. Nagabrahmam who took TAPMI from a small institute to one which received AACSB accreditation. If anything, if a remote place (at least during the early 1990s) like Manipal could achieve this, there is no reason why a B School based out of any location, more so Bangalore cannot achieve this! While many B Schools have done a commendable job in developing their programmes till now, all of us agree on the fact that changing dynamics means that there is never a “job completed moment”. Let us take this opportunity to make ourselves stronger and better. And this Directors’ League is surely a prelude to “*Chairmen’s Club*”, which can engage with promoters in terms of building a strong



education ecosystem, which lays a premium on quality of education. The two platforms can complement each other to ensure quality academic delivery.

A sub group of the Knowledge Commission (consisting of former IIM Directors) suggested that IIMs engage with regional B Schools by mentoring them to reach higher level of quality. This initiative by eMBarkers and IIM Bangalore's Center for Public Policy is a first step in this direction. The larger aim: "[*Building Bandwidth in Management Education*](#)".

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APPENDIX:

Summary of Issues and Solutions Highlighted by Participants

| | Issues raised | | | Solutions suggested | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| | Director | Promoter | Total | Director | Promoter | Total |
| Industry Interface | 10 | 1 | 11 | 13 | 1 | 14 |
| Management/Governance | 12 | 3 | 15 | 9 | 4 | 13 |
| Regulation | 0 | 11 | 11 | 0 | 11 | 11 |
| Student recruitment | 12 | 5 | 17 | 11 | 4 | 15 |
| Placement | 8 | 0 | 8 | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| Academic infrastructure | 7 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| Research | 8 | 0 | 8 | 8 | 1 | 9 |
| Teaching curriculum | 16 | 0 | 16 | 9 | 1 | 10 |
| Faculty | 14 | 2 | 16 | 16 | 0 | 16 |
| Others | 7 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Total issues & solutions | 94 | 24 | 118 | 80 | 24 | 104 |

Out of 118 issues raised, 94 can be resolved by Director using 80 solution mechanisms as seen above.

Legend: Green colour indicates issues that can be resolved by Director, while blue colour indicates intervention requirement from the promoter.